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## MAKING THE COURSE OF STUDY

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Teacher participation in the revision of the course of study is now generally recognized as an essential feature of democratic administration in our public school systems.

How to secure the maximum of teacher participation, with economy of time and effort, and at the same time maintain high standards of educational theory and practice, is the threefold problem which confronts a progressive administration.

The suggestions offered in this paper are made not from the viewpoint of self-satisfaction or with the idea that perfection of attainment has been achieved, but with the hope that the efforts of our staff may be of service to others in the endeavor to lift the grade teacher above the plane of drudgery by giving an opportunity for larger service.

It is the opinion of the writer that much of the difficulty in getting a hearty response from a large staff of teachers in the revision of the course of study is often due to a lack of sufficient and systematic preparation. This does not refer to professional preparation for teaching, although that is of obvious significance, but rather to that special preparation of teachers in service which makes the immediate task seem personal and worth while.

It seems to be a prevailing opinion that a supervisor must be in a new position some little time, say a year, before attempting any large work of an unusual nature. The writer has found that any group, however new the conditions, will follow a leader who has definite ideas and systematic methods of procedure. Tactful, the supervisor should be; sympathetic, he must be, and unafraid. He who expects large results and manifests efficient leadership will usually realize his expectations.

In attempting to secure maximum participation on the part of teachers it is reasonable to assume that they are not unlike the

majority of people—their interest must be awakened and maintained. They must be able to see the need of co-operative endeavor, and they must be permitted to proceed along democratic lines if their work is to assume the dignity befitting a professional pursuit.

Believing that the surest way of realizing one's needs is to take an inventory of one's ideals, the supervisor began the year with a discussion of a few of the most important educational principles. Not knowing her staff, she assumed that any body of teachers assembled in the first meeting of the year would be helped by a brief recall of fundamental concepts. In the stress of beginning school even the greatest inspiration may become shadowed by routine and lose its force. Each teacher was therefore given a bulletin which summarized briefly the thoughts of the day's discussion. Space will not permit the reproduction of this bulletin, but since such bulletins formed a large part in the scheme of the year's work, an outline of this bulletin by questions is here given.

#### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. What should be the largest purpose in the mind of each teacher for her pupils this year?
2. What constitutes genuine, whole-hearted participation by every member of the teaching staff?
3. How may we recognize and capitalize unusual ability wherever it appears?
4. How can we standardize our system of procedure and yet secure real professional growth?
5. What is the teacher's responsibility in the making of the course of study?

#### FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

1. What is individualism? Why encourage it?
2. What is social consciousness? Why encourage it?
3. What is initiative?
4. How may initiative be developed in pupils?
5. What is motivation? What is its value?
6. What dangers are to be avoided while attempting to secure these desired goals?

The questions listed were discussed, not with any desire to overwork educational terms, but to give new meaning, if possible, to these much used terms and to make possible a foundation which

might serve to unify our efforts during the year. The success of the year's work makes it possible to say that the means were well chosen.

As the surest way to secure confidence in teachers is to show confidence in their sincerity and ability, something definite was planned for each teacher to do for the October institute. The following outline is self-explanatory. The teachers were requested to make detailed reports and to have questions in mind for the discussion.

- I. Note examples of individual differences in your room:
  1. Physical
  2. Mental
  3. Moral and social
  4. Home environment
  5. Others
- II. List various ways in which you adjusted conditions to meet these needs
- III. List various means of motivation which you have used in
  1. Reading
  2. Language
  3. Spelling
  4. Other subjects

It is obvious that the teacher who kept the foregoing items constantly in mind during the first month of school was keenly alive to conditions in her room at the very beginning of the semester; thus economy of time and effort was secured. She was also stimulated by a sense of responsibility in meeting her difficulties and by a feeling of co-operation as she shared her experience at the next meeting.

So far this discussion does not seem to have an immediate bearing upon the making of a course of study. It must be borne in mind, however, that the average teacher has not been trained to recognize her function in the making of a course of study. It is safe to say that many teachers consider the course of study as a ready-made document to be furnished by "the powers that be," as any other supplies of the school are furnished, without much thought as to where it originated or as to its value. It is not strange that the average teacher has this attitude since for decades past the chief author of the course of study has been the superin-

tendent or supervisor, and the teacher's duty has been to accept dictation from above.

The procedure outlined served three purposes: (1) It gave each teacher definite suggestions to guide her work and resulted in greater efficiency. (2) It gave unity to the various educational concepts that must of necessity vary greatly in a group of eighty-five teachers who differ in amount, kind, and recency of training. (3) It furnished data for discussion as to what should be included in a course of study.

It was agreed that the contributions on motivation would be helpful to any teacher; therefore, they should be printed as a chapter in the new course of study. Two committee members were appointed by each group to represent them in the organization of this material on motivation. Some of the contributions were of greater excellence than others, but the committee on organization was advised to be generous in judging, since the success of the initial effort was important as a stimulus to enthusiasm. The work of organizing was not easy as almost every member of the staff had contributed something, and there was much repetition. It was decided, in order to have as large representation as possible, that those teachers offering the smallest contributions should receive credit and that the same contributions should be eliminated from the list of the teacher who offered many suggestions. In a way, this was not fair to those who worked to contribute generously, but the generous contributor is usually the most capable and is much less sensitive to discouragement.

The supervisor worked as a member of every committee, but the greatest freedom of discussion was encouraged in order to capitalize the available talent of the entire staff. All committee meetings were one hour in length and were held at the close of the afternoon session, one-half hour of school time being taken and the committee members giving one-half hour of their own time. This distribution of time was thought to be a fair beginning in a community where committee work was an innovation and had not as yet proved its worth.

While this committee was at work the interest of the entire staff was held by a discussion of another bulletin. This bulletin

was headed "Suggestions for the Making of a Course of Study." It consisted of brief, concise, and illuminating quotations on curriculum-making from four leading educators. Then followed pointed suggestions from various authors bearing upon the subject. The following extract indicates the general plan and purpose of the bulletin.

#### THE COURSE OF STUDY

### I. What and why

#### 1. Aims

- a) General aims for the subject
- b) Specific aims for each grade

#### 2. A core of minimum essentials

- a) To provide for citizenship in a social group
- b) To provide for desirable habit formation

#### 3. Sociological basis

- a) General field of work in the subject
  - (1) Emphasis upon the most salient elements
  - (2) Optional elements
- b) Variables should be considered
  - (1) Local conditions studied to meet community needs
- c) Facts of curriculum should bring out social conditions which will contribute to moral training

### II. How and when

#### 1. Psychological adaptation

- a) Subject-matter and method best adapted to age and experience of child.
  - (1) Attention to technique and principles of teaching appropriate for each grade
- b) Provision made for individual differences

It is hoped that the foregoing suggestions may prove helpful in directing our discussions and our efforts in compiling a course of study. It is obvious that there is some overlapping of ideas presented in the various outlines; but this only serves to emphasize their importance. It is believed that these suggestions embody the latest views of many of our most thoughtful educational leaders and are worthy of extended study.

Obviously it was necessary to supplement this bulletin by group discussion in order that each teacher might grasp the essentials of the working principles. A part of each monthly institute session was devoted to a discussion of the making of the course of study. As a further aid to teachers the following books were sent to each

of the ten ward buildings as the nucleus of a professional library for teachers:

Bonser, *The Elementary School Curriculum*  
Charters, *Teaching the Common Branches*  
Chubb, *The Teaching of English*  
Dewey, *Democracy and Education*  
Driggs, *Our Living Language*  
Jessup and Coffman, *The Supervision of Arithmetic*  
Kendall and Mirick, *How to Teach the Fundamental Subjects*  
Klapper, *The Teaching of English*  
McMurray, *How to Study*  
Rapeer and others, *Teaching Elementary School Subjects*  
Sheridan, *Speaking and Writing English*  
Strayer and Englehardt, *The Class Room Teacher*  
Strayer and Norsworthy, *How to Teach*  
Wilson and Wilson, *Motivation of School Work*

It will be noted that books bearing on the teaching of literature and English were most numerous. This was intentional as our emphasis for the year was to be upon these subjects. Other books were added as work progressed.

The teachers were encouraged to participate more largely in the making of the course in reading and penmanship. During the second semester the time seemed favorable for launching the largest work of the year—the construction of a course of study in language. A committee of nine was appointed and was instructed to come to the first meeting ready to discuss general and specific aims in the teaching of English.

The supervisor acted as chairman at each meeting. After the contributions were discussed the written suggestions were turned over to one member for further organization and the committee considered different lines of language work in the grades. As a result of this discussion it was decided to organize the course around the following topics:

- I. Conversation
- II. Stories
- III. Poems
- IV. Fables
- V. Dramatization
- VI. Picture study

- VII. Letter writing
- VIII. Business forms
- IX. Composition
- X. Creative effort
- XI. Technique

In order to interest the entire staff, the following bulletin was distributed to all grade teachers for consideration and discussion. Almost every teacher in the corps responded. As several teachers selected the same problems the committee assembled all contributions under the original titles.

#### ENGLISH

Topics to be discussed at institute, March 26, 1921.

Each teacher will please write and hand in a discussion of one topic.

1. How to take advantage of the spontaneity and naturalness of expression in children entering school.
2. How to develop the feeling for good English.
3. Methods of developing the children's vocabulary.
4. Proper ways of motivating the work.
5. Correlating the work in English with the other subjects in the curriculum.
6. The relation of oral to written work in the various grades.
7. In what grade should written work be introduced?
8. The successive steps in passing from oral to written work when the latter is first introduced.
9. How to introduce the purely formal phases of language work—punctuation, capitalization, etc.
10. How to introduce the use of the paragraph.
11. The purpose and relative value of copying, dictation, and reproduction exercises.
12. How to prevent the purely formal phases of language work from interfering with the thought phases.
13. How may pupils be made conscious of their language problems without destroying spontaneity of expression?
14. Prevention vs. correction of mistakes in oral and written English.
15. Correction of oral and written English.
16. Suggestions for securing variety and facility in expression.
17. Relation of English grammar to composition.
18. In what grade should English grammar be introduced?
19. What should be the nature of the exercises in English grammar in grades below the seventh?

The discussion of the foregoing problems occupied the main portion of the March institute. At this time all teachers were



asked to send to the committee examples of motivation in language which they had found helpful. These contributions were later organized as one chapter of the course of study.

The entire staff had concentrated on a better speech campaign early in November. Each teacher had been requested to write an outline of her procedure for the week and to describe in detail any original contribution in the way of plays, slogans, or other work of interest by the pupils. All of this material was now ready for the language committee to prepare for printing. It was the unanimous opinion of the committee that a course of study should tell *how* to teach as well as *what* to teach, so this phase received considerable emphasis.

A very important part of any course of study is the assignment of work by grades. The committee decided (1) to determine, from the standpoint of the psychological development of the child, just where each line of work indicated in the outline should be placed, and (2) to enlarge the outline by concrete material, helpful suggestions, and specific references for the teacher's use in every phase of the work.

At the beginning of the assignment for each grade is a list of specific references in professional literature. All of the books referred to are in the school library. Besides the references to the textbook in use, references were made to supplementary texts furnished each teacher. By following this method of outlining various phases of the work and quoting the necessary references, the tendency to follow the textbook as a guide rather than the needs of the pupils was avoided.

In selecting the lists of stories, poems, fables, and pictures to be used in each grade, the recommendations of the entire staff were requested. Each teacher sent to the committee a list of five suggestions under each heading. From this list and by means of further research by the committee, a required list and an optional list of stories, fables, poems, and pictures were assigned to each grade.

Early in the school year, as a motive for best effort, a bulletin was sent by the supervisor to all teachers announcing that a cabinet was in the office of the supervisor for exhibiting the best

work of pupils in language, arithmetic, and spelling. In order that this device might be truly representative the five best papers were selected by the pupils every two weeks. If a given pupil's paper was chosen a second time, it was not sent, but his name was placed on the honor roll in his room as long as his papers continued to maintain the standard. When his paper was not selected as best, his name was removed from the honor roll. At the close of the first semester the language committee selected examples of children's work from this cabinet for the new course of study.

By this time the teachers were conscious of high standards in teaching, and when type lessons were needed and requested, several teachers volunteered. A description of these lessons and also of three lessons taught by the supervisor were printed as one chapter in the course of study.

At a final meeting of all teachers certain technical problems were discussed and assigned as nearly as possible to the grade where the need was greatest. Each teacher listed the technical errors most frequently noticed in her grade, and in the final assignment each grade was made responsible for certain specific language habits and inhibitions.

Perhaps a word of explanation would be helpful in regard to the final assembling of all of this material. It is obvious that unless great care is exercised the general form of contributions made in this manner will vary greatly and the final form will lack coherency. The teachers were requested to follow a definite form in presenting material. Even then there was much work for the committee in assembling the material so that repetitions were avoided and systematic organization obtained.

Five substitute teachers were regularly employed and were free to help with the organization of material or to teach for a committee member whose services were especially needed for work on the course of study.

The completed course of study has the following chapters:

- I. Different Lines of Language Work
- II. General Aims in the Teaching of English
- III. Story Telling (contributed by the supervisor)
- IV. Problems in English

- V. The Motivation of Language Work
- VI. Plans for Better Speech Week
- VII. Outline of Work by Grades (including examples of children's work)
- VIII. Type Lessons
- IX. Bibliography

#### SUMMARY

Teachers should participate in the making of the course of study. If high standards are to be maintained, teachers in service must be encouraged to keep in touch with the most advanced educational views. Bulletins should be accompanied by vivid discussions if interest is to be aroused. The entire staff must feel responsible for contributions when requested. Each teacher should receive credit for his efforts whenever the nature of the contribution permits.

Each committee member should feel responsible for his share of the work. The work should be so organized that every committee meeting should begin and close promptly. Careful planning will economize both time and effort. Directions should be explicit when a request is made for contributions. Bulletins sent out from the supervisor's office signed by the committee are more effective than requests from individual committee members.

Finally, the supervisor in charge should be capable of intelligent comprehension of the task, cheerful, enthusiastic leadership, sympathetic appreciation of human nature, and an untiring perseverance that can carry many details to a final culmination.